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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, April 6, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "SPRING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

--ooOoo--

Listeners, I have never heard whether spring fever was catching or not, but I know it is spreading among my questioners, and spreading fast. You should see the way spring questions have been pouring in with every mail this week, coming as thick and fast as April raindrops. No use trying to answer all the inquiries today, so I've selected the more urgent food questions to concentrate on first.

Several letters have asked about cooking rhubarb--or pie-plant, as some listeners call it. That's a pleasant old-fashioned term--pie-plant. Come to think of it, I believe it is a New England term. You know how the cooks of New England see pie-possibilities in all sorts of things.

The first rhubarb letter asks how much water to add to rhubarb in making sauce. The only I answer I know is: usually none at all. Because young rhubarb stalks are so juicy, you don't need to add water for cooking. They can literally stew in their own juice.

I know of at least three good and easy ways to make delicious and beautiful rhubarb sauce. First, of course, you select the young and colorful stalks. As every gardener knows, stalks of the first cutting have better flavor and color and are also more tender and juicy than the older ones. Also, as the rhubarb grows older, the stalks become more acid. So choose young rhubarb and wash and trim it. Then, cut it in pieces about a half to an inch long.

Some people make rhubarb sauce by mixing 2 parts of the fruit with 1 part of sugar, and cooking very gently over a low fire until the liquid forms a sirup and the rhubarb is tender.

The exception to the rule of adding no water is the method of making a thick sirup first and then dropping the rhubarb into it and cook^{ing} until tender. This takes just a few minutes.

Oh, yes--and then you can make rhubarb sauce in the oven also. Bake it in a covered dish--a glass baking dish, if you like to see the attractive pink sauce through the glass. Butter the baking dish, cover the bottom with a layer of rhubarb, sprinkle on a layer of sugar, then rhubarb again, and so on until the dish is filled. Sprinkle sugar over the top, add small pieces of butter and the grated rind of a lemon--or cinnamon, if you prefer that flavor. Bake the dish slowly until the fruit is tender. Long, slow baking gives rhubarb a rich, red color.

Which brings up the second question! Another listener wants to know whether to remove the skin in preparing rhubarb or to leave it on. That depends on what kind of sauce you like. If you like a lovely reddish sauce with each piece of rhubarb tender, then you'll leave the skin on. The skin gives color and helps keep the pieces in shape. On the other hand, if you like a pale greenish sauce, mushy or mostly liquid because the rhubarb has cooked to shreds, then you'll peel the stalks.

Maybe you can guess what other spring food is causing questions these days. You're right. Asparagus is the answer. Sure as fate every spring a whole bevy of letters comes in asking the best method for cooking asparagus. A good cook of my acquaintance recommends tying the bunch of asparagus together and standing it upright on a rack in the saucepan for a few minutes so the boiling water can cook the firm ends of the stalks. Then she lays the asparagus down flat in the water for the next 10 minutes so the tips will cook tender.

Another method is to stand the tied bunch of asparagus in the bottom of a double boiler and add boiling water. Then turn the top of the double boiler upside down over the tips. The steam will cook the tips while the boiling water cooks the stalks.

Which brings us to another group of food questions--those about cooking the spring meats, lamb and veal. Writes one listener: "Since lamb and veal are both young meats, I have supposed that you cook them the same way. But my lamb roasts come out tender and juicy while my veal roasts are very likely to be dry and stringy. Will you explain the difference in the cooking of lamb and veal?"

Answer: The good old rule of suiting the method to the meat holds especially well in the case of these two spring meats. They are both young and tender, to be sure, but lamb contains a good deal of fat while veal usually is a lean meat. So it is easier to keep lamb juicy during cooking than veal.

Since lamb is a fat meat, you season your roast with salt and pepper, dust over with flour, and lay it skin down and fat side up (or cut flesh up), on a rack in an open roasting pan. You add no water to the pan. And you do not need to baste the roast, for^s the fat melts, it will do its own basting. To roast lamb, either keep the oven at moderate temperature 350° F. the entire time, or start by searing the meat for half an hour in a hot oven, that is, about 480°, and then reduce the heat to 300° for the finish. By either method, allow about half an hour to each pound of meat. The points to remember about roasting lamb, then, are to have it fat side up in an open roasting pan and to add no water during cooking and do no basting.

With veal the story is quite different, for veal is usually a lean meat. It needs the protection of a covered roaster and it often is better if you add fat. You can lard the roast with strips of salt pork or suet or bacon. Adding fat helps keep the roast juicy and improves its flavor. Season your roast with salt and pepper first, then dust with flour and place it on a rack in a roasting pan as you did the lamb roast. Now cover the roaster and set it in a moderately hot oven--one that registers from 375 to 400 degrees. No searing first with a veal roast. Cook the roast until well done and tender. By the time it is done, it will have a brown surface and the drippings will be beautifully brown for gravy. So the points to remember about cooking a veal roast are: use a covered roaster; add strips of fat; use a moderately hot oven throughout the cooking.

